

Carolina's Saturday heroes often call on God for support and strength

by Buddy Bultman
DTH Contributor

The meeting at Kenan Field House gets started late as usual. About 70 young people, male and female, are sitting on the floor around the room, laughing and talking with one another. Their small talk, now a noisy din, subsides when a clean-cut, well-built young man picks up a guitar. He leads them in a few songs. The group likes to sing. Then a short film on Tom Landry, coach of the Dallas Cowboys, is shown. After that, the speaker is introduced—Albert Long, the last four letter man at Carolina. Long, in his early forties, is dressed in jeans and a sport shirt. He opens his Bible and talks to the group about the Apostle Paul, whom he calls "the world's greatest athlete."

In Carmichael Auditorium, the pep band plays as the Tar Heel basketball team takes warm-up shots. The team at the opposite end of the floor is dressed in bright red warm-ups emblazoned with the initials "AIA" in blue. The visiting team, Athletes in Action, trails by four points after an exhausting first half. They don't retire to the locker room to discuss game strategy as the Tar Heels do. Instead, they don their warm-ups and listen attentively as their coach, Bill Oates, addresses the noisy crowd in Carmichael. Oates asks that the crowd remain seated for a moment to listen as several people "share what the person of Jesus Christ has done in their lives." Two AIA players and John Peterson, a gold medalist in wrestling at the Montreal Olympics, successively tell the crowd of how they became Christians. The presentation lasts 15 minutes and, amidst the now quieter crowd in Carmichael, is closed with prayer.

These events on the Carolina campus are typical of what's happening on college campuses across the nation. The message of Christianity is being linked with college athletics, largely due to the efforts of two national organizations—the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and Athletes in Action. Athletes in Action (AIA) is a part of

Campus Crusade for Christ, a non-denominational campus ministry. AIA sends teams in basketball, wrestling, gymnastics and track and field to play college teams, using this as an opportunity to evangelize. And the teams fielded by AIA are not second-rate. The AIA wrestling team was the 1975 national champion. And the 1976 basketball team has beaten Maryland and lost to national power Marquette by only four points.

Brad Hoffman, former player at Carolina, now plays for the AIA basketball team. While at Carolina, Hoffman led a Bible study for high school and college students. "That was a real rewarding experience," he said, "and I think it really prepared me for what I'm doing now."

"The Lord is the source of my power and strength. I pray all during a game."—Larry Tedder, UNC footballer and FCA president

The boyish-looking basketball player talked about how he became a Christian. "When I was young, I looked up to fellows like John Havlicek and Jerry West (former pro basketball players). I thought if I could only be like them, that I would find security in that. So I looked for security in athletics. But something was missing. A lot of people at the church I went to told me I needed to look to Christ and God, but I said, 'Naw, that's not for me.'" Hoffman said he soon began to realize that there had to be something more in life than athletics. "I began looking at Jesus Christ and what He claimed. He claimed He'd never leave me or forsake me. So I asked Him to come into my life. And He's kept that promise."

Hoffman said he is excited about working with Athletes in Action. "God's using me, and I'm doing something I enjoy."

The Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) doesn't subsidize teams like AIA. It's

emphasis is more on reaching the college athlete, rather than reaching others through the athlete. Mike "Moose" Morris, state director of FCA, explained its purpose. "The purpose of the ministry is to confront athletes and coaches, and through them, present to the youth of the nation the challenge and adventure of following Christ and serving Him through the church and its vocation."

Larry Tedder, fullback for the UNC football team and president of the campus FCA, talked about his involvement with it. "For me, Thursday night (when FCA meets) is a special time to get together with Christian friends. You just can't be a Christian by yourself. After all, Jesus had his disciples. In FCA, there is a tremendous

amount of love for each other. We enjoy each other." Tedder also enjoys the opportunity to work with young people. "Last weekend I went to Wilmington for an FCA Day. That's where we, as athletes, work with high school and junior high kids. I led a 'huddle group' which consisted of about 12 guys. That was the best part. I got to really know the guys. In working with them, I let them see Christ in my life and the fulfillment I have in life. I sort of plant the seed and pray that God will let it grow. I've also, through FCA, had a chance to share my faith with young kids at different churches in the area."

Tedder also actively shares his faith with his teammates. "I lead the team in prayer at pre-game meals and after games. That means a lot to me. I know the team's affected by it. Sure, I get kidded about a lot of things. I get called 'Saint Larry' and 'The Preacher.' But I think they respect me for my beliefs. I uphold

them with my life. To me, at least they're not noticing a difference. So the kidding doesn't bother me. Like I was telling a kid at Wilmington last weekend, 'I have yet to be spit on or stoned.'"

Carolina's FCA has grown impressively in the past year. Tedder said that last year, they started out with 14 to 18 attending each meeting. This year, there are over 70 people at every meeting. "It's grown by word of mouth," he said.

Many of the coaches and athletic staff at UNC work closely with FCA. Moyer Smith, the assistant athletic director, is director of the campus FCA. Baseball coach Mike Roberts and assistant track coach Hubert West serve as sponsors. Athletic director Bill Cobey is also interested in working with FCA.

Roberts said he sees FCA as a way to "give young people an opportunity to meet once a week and be able to be around other college students who are Christians. We're a Christian group with a core of athletes. However, we're open to anyone. Just because somebody's not playing a varsity sport doesn't mean he's not an athlete. Some people participated in athletics in high school. Some just enjoy athletics as a spectator. There's a spot in it for everybody."

Women are a recent addition to the FCA group. At the beginning of the last year there were none. This year, women make up at least half the group. Nancy Fitzgerald, a sophomore, began attending FCA last year. "I was the only girl there," she said. "But the guys didn't object. In fact, they told me to come back and bring some friends." She explained why she got involved in FCA. "I played three sports in high school—tennis, volleyball and basketball. So athletics is an important part of my life. I love the fellowship FCA provides, and I don't feel uncomfortable because I'm a woman. My spiritual needs are being met through FCA."

Several women on the volleyball and basketball teams at UNC attend now. But the majority of the women, like Fitzgerald, don't play a varsity sport. But most played some type of sport in high school.

Much of the emphasis in FCA is on how to live the Christian life as an athlete. Coach Roberts said, "I try to use my Christianity every day by the way I live, coach, and act. I try to let my life show it as I live it day to day. I ask the Lord to help me prepare for a game the best way I can—to do a thorough job using his guidance and strength. I know I'll be successful—maybe not in terms of wins or losses. But win or lose, if I've prepared to the best of my ability, then I know I'm successful."

A poster on the wall of Larry Tedder's dorm room pictures a dejected football player along with the words "I quit." In the bottom corner is a picture of a cross with the words, "I didn't." "I can really relate my faith to playing football," Tedder said. "A lot of people say Christianity is just a belief. But it's not. It's your whole life. I feel like as an athlete I should be mentally, physically and spiritually prepared for a game. The Lord is the source of my power and strength. I pray all during a game."

Tedder doesn't see any inconsistency between being a Christian and being in a rough, contact sport. "I know the Lord doesn't want me to hurt anybody. But I love to cream the guy on the other team. And I praise the Lord for it, because he gave me the power to do it. But it burns me up to hear people on the team say they want to hurt somebody on the other team. I can identify with the guy on the other team who gets hurt. To want to hurt somebody is stupid in any sport."

FCA, like AIA, does use big name athletes to attract people to hear the message of Christianity. Don McClanen, founder of FCA, once said, "The athlete is used to sell everything from razor blades to automobiles. Why not harness this hero-worship to boost the greatest product of all—the Christian faith."

Jim Abrahamson pastor of Chapel Hill Bible Church, objects to this rationale. "Part of my frustration with groups like Athletes in Action and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes is their using of athletics as a come-on. There's a certain rationale there, and I'm not excited about it. This tends to endorse a value system that, as Christians, we need to repudiate. Using athletes to entice people to hear the gospel reflects a wrong value system. Now, if you're using a professional athlete to speak to another athlete, there is a place for it. However, the professional athlete is often exploited by this." Abrahamson does concede that FCA and AIA serve as an effective outreach to young people. "They'll listen to an athlete before they'll listen to someone else."



Brad Hoffman

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"But there are times when Christianity in athletics is like putting precious pearls in a matchbox. The container just isn't suitable. But it doesn't always have to be that way. If it's used where Christians who are athletes seek to ask questions about relating their faith to athletics, this is good. Athletes on the college campus are a minority group. Because of their schedule, they're often out of touch with the social affairs of the university. I think this is a legitimate place for a Christian ministry, and I think FCA recognizes that."

Abrahamson also said there are distinct parallels between Christianity and athletics. "It's interesting the way Paul makes parallels with athletics. In the ninth chapter of I Corinthians, he equates spiritual life with the life of an athlete. Much of what is involved in following Christ—discipline, goals, priorities—is also a part of athletics. Athletics is a field that has a lot of potential for the illustration of Christian discipleship."

Union to choose new head

The Carolina Union will name a successor to its president, Doris Hudson, for the 1977-78 academic year on Feb. 9.

Applications are available at the Union desk and will be accepted through Feb. 2. The position is open to any regularly enrolled student at the University. Experience with the Union is not necessary. The selection is made through the

applications and interviews with the applicants by the Union Board of Directors.

The duties of the Union president include chairing weekly meetings of the Union Activities Board and representing the Union in matters involving the University administration and other student organizations.



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Jacques Brel is alive and well and living in Paris, and needs people to work on CREWS-sets, lighting, and costumes. Sign-up at Union Desk.

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